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The following note summarizes some of the lessons – potentially relevant for the US context – drawn from an analysis of selected stakeholder engagement processes in planning and decision-making on radioactive waste management (RWM) in Finland, France and the UK. The cases analyzed were the following:

- **Finland**: the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (1997-1999) of the final disposal of radioactive waste in Finland, which was followed by an acceptance by the local municipality of Eurajoki and a Parliamentary decision-in-principle on the long-term geological disposal of radioactive waste
- **France**: the debates on radioactive waste management organized by the National Commission of Public Debate, CNDP (2005-2006)
- **UK**: the deliberations within the UK Committee on Radioactive Waste Management, CoRWM (2003-2006)

The cases were examined against the principles of "deliberative democracy".

First, two general remarks:

1. The all-important context

Success of public and stakeholder engagement crucially depends on the historically shaped political, cultural and institutional context in which the specific engagement processes are embedded. Therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and it is futile to search for "best practice" examples applicable in all situations regardless the context. This does not prevent the possibility of lessons to be learned, but the lessons concern more the "contextual" aspects that are likely to be crucial for the success of public and stakeholder engagement in any given situation of radioactive waste management practice.

2. The "Finnish wonder" – problems with the "ideal democracy"

At least three key lessons can be drawn from what has sometimes been perceived as the Finnish "wonder" – a seemingly smooth and highly democratic decision-making process leading to a consensus and an approval in 2001 – first by the municipal council in the municipality in question (Eurajoki), and then almost unanimously by Parliament – of final geological disposal of high-level radioactive waste. The example has been portrayed as a demonstration of a well-functioning representative democracy, yet especially from the perspective of deliberative democracy, the Finnish situation exhibited a number of shortcomings.

The first problem relates to the near-monopoly held by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (since 2008, Ministry of ???), together with industry and key nuclear energy research organisations, in producing authoritative knowledge production in the area of radioactive waste management. In the face of such a "knowledge monopoly", it was difficult, if not impossible, for alternatives to geological disposal to gain credibility. It is notable that even the radioactive waste management company (Posiva) representative considered the resulting absence of "counter-expertise" as a major flaw in the Finnish EIA process (see e.g. Vira 2006). A key function of the EIA process is to produce a number of plausible policy options for public discussion and appraisal, yet without a plurality of sources of knowledge and expertise, the alternatives to geological disposal remained unavoidably underdeveloped and lacking in credibility.

The second Finnish particularity is the extremely – perhaps excessively – high level of trust in public institutions among the Finnish public. Trust in the nuclear safety authorities and the nuclear industry is particularly strong. While public trust in institutions is one of the preconditions for a functioning (deliberative) democracy – and the "institutional mistrust" in the UK (see e.g. Bickerstaff et al. 2008) and a similar erosion of trust in France (e.g. ???) have proven problematic for nuclear waste policy – an excess of trust can arguably have its downsides. In particular, such excessive trust can reduce the motivation of the public to participate and diminish the general demand for citizen engagement in policymaking – considered unnecessary and sometimes even harmful for "rational" decision-making. Moreover, the excessive trust can also feed opportunism, manipulation strategic action (Dogan 2005) instead of fostering the principles of deliberative democracy.

The third crucial feature of the Finnish context is the relatively low credibility and status of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), especially on highly technical issues such as nuclear waste management. For instance, and in rather striking contrast with most other Western European countries, few Finns consider the NGOs a highly reliable source of information on nuclear safety. Such a lack of credibility of the NGOs contributes to the lack of serious alternatives to geological disposal, and undermines possibilities for pluralist societal debate on a wide range of options in nuclear waste management.

While it would be futile to search for ready-made recipes of success in RWM, the British, Finnish and French experiences underline a number of general principles for RWM.

3. Framing, upstream engagement and keeping the process open

Early engagement of the public and stakeholders in the process is crucial. This was demonstrated on the one hand by the success of the CoRWM process, which started from an "open table", and the general frustration generated by the Finnish EIA, which suffered from the fact that final geological disposal had gained an overwhelmingly dominant status as early as in the 1980s. Keeping the options open as long as possible, and opening up the process to different perspectives, normative standpoints, and participants are crucial preconditions for the results of the deliberation to be considered as legitimate. However, such openness is also likely to be the best "insurance policy" in the face of uncertainty of knowledge.

4. Do not fear conflict

Rather than seeking consensus around a single acceptable option, RWM policy would do well in embracing conflict as a potentially productive and constructive force. All participants are unlikely to ever fully agree on the substance – the waste management options. By contrast, the participatory/deliberative processes should seek to clarify and make explicit the various conflicts and perspectives involved, seeking agreement on the process of decision-making rather than on the decisions themselves. Clear, explicit and transparent presentation of the conflicts is likely to be more valuable than a forced consensus around the lowest common denominator.

5. Science and public and stakeholder engagement are not contradictory, but complementary sources of information

In particular the CoRWM process demonstrated the value of explicit and concerted efforts to combine high-quality science on the one hand and public & stakeholder engagement on the other – not as contradictory but mutually supporting sources of evidence. Experience from Finland, France and the UK confirmed the experiences from policymaking from a wide range of issues concerning science and technology: public engagement should not be limited to the "downstream" stages at which choices are made between different options elaborated by technical experts. In particular, public and stakeholders should play a key role in the elaboration and assessment of the different technical options.

6. Involving a broad range of stakeholders

The choice of participants in deliberative processes is obviously crucial determinant of success. As a general rule, the participants should represent the widest possible range of individuals with different educational, institutional and normative backgrounds. Should there be a bias in selection, it should be in favor of "skeptics" (i.e. opponents of the favored "official" position) rather than in favor of the proponents of the dominant policy alternative. However, some citizen groups and NGOs may not wish to contribute to participatory processes instigated by the government, considering that such engagement might compromise their own credibility and legitimacy, and oblige them to give their "label" to policies that they fundamentally disagree upon. Such absence of participation – and possible protests outside the formal decision-making process – should be embraced as part of the democratic process, rather than as a threat to democracy.

7. Seek to even out asymmetries of power, in particular those stemming from differential access to knowledge

The Finnish experience was perhaps the most striking demonstration of the deleterious consequences from a disequilibrium between participants in their capacity to generate and access to authoritative knowledge on different waste management options. RWM policymaking should be characterized by a conscious and concerted effort to even out such asymmetries of power between participants. Concrete financial support is likely to be needed to ensure that different normative perspectives – manifested in different waste management options – can be developed into concrete policy options and tested. Making available sufficient public funding for scientific and

technical research to be conducted or commissioned by citizens' organizations would be a possibility worth considering.

More generally, efforts should be made to ensure that especially the weakest and unorganized groups get their voice heard in planning and decision-making.

8. Inspire public trust in the long term – through transparency, honesty and consistency

While excessive public trust may work against the principles of deliberative democracy (as the Finnish example suggests), in most countries the problem is the absence of sufficient trust to enable genuine inclusive processes of citizen engagement. Transparency and access to information are the very first conditions for the long-term work of trust-building. Honesty and consistency are essential: a lot of the "trust capital" built through the UK CoRWM process was subsequently lost as a result of the government's attempts to use the CoRWM recommendations to justify its nuclear new-build policy.

The institutional arrangements conducive to trust-building are highly context-dependent. Both in the UK and France, the creation of a new institution within (UK CoRWM) or outside (the French Commission of National Debate) the RWM policy domain helped to generate trust in a situation in which the existing institutions suffered from low legitimacy. An obvious problem with the creation of new institutions is their possible disconnect with the rest of the institutions of policymaking in the area.